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SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

EARLY ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, this week I will be introducing the EARLY Act: The Breast Cancer Education and Awareness Requires Learning Young Act of 2009. The EARLY Act is designed to empower young women to learn the facts, know their bodies, speak up for their health, and embrace support.

Despite the perception, young women can and do get breast cancer. More than 10,000 women under 40 are diagnosed with breast cancer every year in the United States. Although the incidence of breast cancer in young women is much lower, young women's breast cancers are generally more aggressive, are diagnosed at a later stage, and result in lower survival rates.

Additionally, certain ethnic groups, including Ashkenazi Jews and African American young women, have an increased risk of breast cancer.

I became acutely aware of all of this information, and more, a little more than a year ago. After finding a lump in my breast while doing my routine breast self-exam in the shower, I learned a few weeks later from my doctor that I had breast cancer.

Upon learning of my diagnosis and after genetic counseling, I also decided to have a blood test that would show whether I had a genetic mutation in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene. As a woman of Ashkenazi Jewish descent, I was in a category of at-risk populations for these gene mutations. The test results showed that I did indeed carry the BRCA2 genetic marker that suggests a greater susceptibility to breast and ovarian cancers.

After further consultation with my doctors and my husband, I decided to have a double mastectomy and have my ovaries removed to reduce the likelihood of a recurrence of cancer. Today, with a clean bill of health and cancer-free, I plan to introduce the EARLY Act.

The EARLY Act encourages young women to be familiar with the look and feel of their breasts. By knowing what feels normal, a young woman has a better chance of knowing when something feels different.

The EARLY Act will also work to educate young women about changes in their body that could be warning signs of breast cancer. We want them to know that it doesn't only start with a lump. It can be swelling, a rash, breast pain, nipple pain, redness or scaliness, too.

The EARLY Act will encourage young women to be their own voice—to speak up for themselves and know when they need to go to their doctor.

The EARLY Act will teach both young women and medical professionals alike about risk factors, warning signs of breast cancer, and predictive tools such as genetic testing, that can help women make informed decisions about their health.

It will also provide grants to organizations dedicated to supporting young women and the unique issues we face when diagnosed with breast cancer, as well as managing and understanding their risks.

Today, we often fail to teach about risk in this country. As a result, many of us face serious consequences in our lives. We need to change the educational dialogue and empower not only young women, but everyone to take control of the risks they face. And that begins with education and awareness.

I thought I knew all of my personal risk factors for breast cancer. Because of those risk factors, I performed self-exams, went to my doctor regularly, and have been a longtime legislative advocate in the fight against breast cancer. But when I was diagnosed, I found out I had more risk factors than I was aware of.

For example, I had absolutely no idea that as an Ashkenazi Jewish woman, I was five times more likely than the general population to have an altered BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene, or what the risks of carrying that gene entailed.

This bill will give all young women the tools they need to take control of the risks by teaching awareness of their personal risks and what they can do to manage those risks.

At the end of the day, the old saying rings true: Knowledge is power. By making sure young women know their risk factors, the EARLY Act is the first step in transforming how we approach the fight against breast cancer.

In hearing my story, some people might say I was lucky. While I was certainly fortunate enough to have access to good health care, I didn't find my tumor early because of luck. I found my tumor early because of knowledge and awareness. I knew I should perform breast self-exams, and I was aware of what my body was supposed to feel like.

It is my hope that by sharing my story we will pass the Breast Cancer Education and Awareness Requires Learning Young Act of 2009 into law this year and further reduce the death rate of young women diagnosed with breast cancer.

We need to ensure that every young woman in America can rely on more than just luck. Their survival depends on it.

I urge my colleagues to cosponsor this vital legislation. Thank you very much.

HONORING AN AMERICAN ANIMAL-LOVING CHAMPION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, my family and I have always been pet lovers. In fact, we have always been owned by at least one cat and one dog. We support many animal rescue organizations. The current dog and cat we have are both rescue pets. However, we cannot hold a candle to a person whose life has been dedicated to saving animals.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of a great American, a woman with a passion for the humane treatment of animals, my friend, Gertrude Maxwell. Gertrude Maxwell is the founder, past president, and lifetime chairman of Save-A-Pet of Illinois, which she founded more than 35 years ago. Later, she founded and served as president of Save-A-Pet of Florida. Then, 15 years ago, she started the National Save-a-Pet Foundation, where she currently serves as director and chairman.

Her Save-A-Pet organization exists for one reason—saving animals. It is a nonprofit group dedicated to saving abandoned, homeless, or lost pets, and is committed to shielding pets from the practice of animal euthanasia.

Gertrude is a champion of abandoned and unwanted pets and, as a fellow animal lover, I am inspired by her pioneering work with Save-A-Pet. When she discovered in 1972 that more than 90,000 pets were destroyed every month in the United States, she set about the work of shrinking and hopefully one day eliminating the number of pets euthanized in America.

Throughout her lifetime of work on behalf of animals, Gertrude has established and maintained many animal hospitals and adoption centers. Thanks to her unwavering commitment to saving pets, her work has directly saved nearly 100,000 pets over the course of her decades-long campaign on behalf of animals.

After more than 35 years of advocacy for animals, she is still working for the humane treatment of animals. Her tireless efforts also find her lobbying for laws to aid animal welfare, and recently bore fruit when the Save-A-Pet Act was signed into law in Florida last spring.

This legislation creates what is known as a Direct Support Organization that will raise funds from individuals, corporations, and small businesses to provide grants to animal shelters in emergency situations. This organization will provide for spaying and neutering of abandoned cats and dogs, reduce the need for euthanasia of animals, and reduce animal cruelty.

The Save-A-Pet Act was widely supported by Governor Charlie Crist and organizations like the Florida Veterinary Medical Association; the Florida Association of Kennel Clubs; the Florida Animal Control Association, and the National Rifle Association.